

MAGONIA⁸⁶

Interpreting contemporary vision and belief **November 2004**



ALIEN MIMICRY

Just how good
are the aliens at
disguising themselves,
asks Michael McHugh



MAGONIA 86
(incorporating MUFOB 133)

NOVEMBER 2004

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SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS
Magonia is available by exchange with other magazines, or by subscription at the following rates:

U. K.: £9.50 (6 issues)
Europe: 20.00 euros (6 issues)
USA: \$20.00 (6 issues)
Others: £8.00 (4 issues)

US subscribers must pay in dollar bills. We are unable to accept checks drawn on American banks.

European subscribers should pay in Euro notes.

Cheques and money orders must be made payable to JOHN RIMMER, not 'Magonia'.

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EDITORIAL NOTES



At the recent *Fortean Times* UnConvention (see BackPage) I was shown a copy of a popular weekly magazine, published in 1925. *TP's and Cassell's Weekly* was edited by T. P. O'Connor, an Irish Nationalist M.P. who represented a constituency in Liverpool. Unlike the tabloids of today, the articles in *T.P's Weekly* are intelligent commentaries on current events and brief articles on such topics as 'Bards of Modern Wales', Literary Past of Ipswich - Neither Robust nor Inspiring,, and 'Droll Fifteenth Century Sermons', as well as a page of readers' questions.

But our main interest lies in 'T.P's Post Bag, and in particular the first letter - "A Weekly Prize of One Guinea is offered for the most interesting letter printed". And here is that letter in its entirety:

"SIR,-There are recorded indications that this earth has, from time to time, been visited by explorers from other worlds. In *Nature* (May 25, 1893) is published an account, by Captain Charles J. Norcock, of H.M.S. *Caroline*, of a fleet of lights in the sky, which he saw, upon the night of February 24, 1893, between Shanghai and Japan. These luminous objects, if not lights upon several vessels from some other world, moved, sometimes in a massed formation, and sometimes in an irregular line. Anything of a meteoric nature is excluded, because the duration was two hours. The next night these appearances were observed again, moving as if exploring, for seven hours and a half.

"Upon July 2, 1907, according to an account by Bishop John S. Michaud, published in the *Monthly Weather Review* (Washington), 1907, page 310, a "torpedo-shaped body" appeared in the sky, over the city of Burlington, Vermont. For a while it was stationary, and then it slowly moved away. "Tongues of fire" issued from the object. There was a terrific explosion. Because conditions were stormy at the time, an attempt was made to explain the explosion and something that was seen to fall in terms of "ball-lightning," but the account is of a vessel which appeared, seemed to fire a pro-

jectile, and sailed away. There was no known airship of this earth that could have appeared in Vermont in July, 1907."

Well the first phenomenon sounds like some sort of astronomical sighting - things which hang around for hours and appear night after night, usually are. The second is more puzzling, but perhaps ball-lightning is not a completely unreasonable suggestion. So far so unremarkable. But the real interest of this letter is who it's from. The proud winner of the Right Hon. T. P. O'Connor's guinea (that's £1.05, to you youngsters) was none other than Charles Fort! Fort lived in London for just three years, spending most of his time in the British Museum Reading Room. Was he, I wonder, a regular contributor to the popular press of the era, or was this letter a one-off? Maybe he tried to augment his income by winning 'most interesting letter' prizes! If anyone can throw light on this, or come up with another Fortean contribution contemporary journals, we would be eager to learn of it.

Can anyone explain to me why the American MUFGON organization still appears to be taken seriously? The latest issue of its *Journal* received at Magonia has a cover showing a crude drawing of a face with large 'alien'-style eyes. This is supposed to depict Raechel [*sic*], the college roommate of a girl called Marisa, whose mother tells the story. Raechel is described as a very strange person, and the clear implication is that she is some sort of alien-human hybrid. The main reason for this seems to be that she didn't have a boyfriend and had never heard of Simon and Garfunkle!

Raechel seems to have been a very lonely person who may have suffered from a form of Asperger's Syndrome and had difficulty socializing. But in the climate of fear which is being promoted by researchers like Budd Hopkins, such people seem to be in danger of being marginalised even further. This pernicious nonsense is going to end in a tragedy.

Visions Before Midnight

Witchcraft, Folklore and the Prehistory of the Abduction Phenomenon

David Sivier

Ever since Vallee and Keel put pen, or typewriter ribbon to paper in the '70s, it's been an axiom among proponents of the psychosocial hypothesis that the UFO phenomenon is merely the modern variant of a range of paranormal encounters and visitations by supernatural others.

Despite their technological trappings, modern UFO sightings are merely the scientific expression of deep religious and mystical impulses from within the human psyche, impulses, which have given rise to previous ages' myths of encounters with angels, demons, elves and ghosts.

Far from being encounters with objectively real, nuts and bolts extraterrestrial spacecraft, UFO visitations, and much of the culture surrounding them, is a twentieth century technological religious experience. This is, and always has been, explicit in the case of UFO religions such as the Aetherius

Society of George King and the Unarius sect founded by Ruth Norman in California. Although King and Adamski have passed on, the era of the Contactee with his or her extraterrestrial message for mankind still continues, with channelled messages about impending ecological and planetary catastrophe from 9-foot tall Pleiadian reptilians, Ashtar Space Command and any number of communicating entities, or given to those unfortunates who believe, or are led to believe, that they have been abducted and medically tortured by the aliens aboard the spacecraft.

Furthermore, attempts to

interpret and communicate with the underlying entities by occult means are still carried out today. One of the most notorious examples of this is arguably Allen H. Greenfield's *Secret Cipher of the Ufonauts*, which used Qabalistic numerological systems derived from Aleister Crowley to plumb the cosmic mysteries behind the phenomenon. / Thomas Bullard's research into the 'Old Hag' phenomenon, and Persinger's now notorious hypothesis that such encounters originate in disturbances of the brain's Temporal Lobes have added further weight to the psychosocial view that alien encounters are essentially an internal, psychological experience, despite Bullard's own view that the Old Hag phenomenon is an objectively real, rather than folkloric experience.

Although the above short summary of the psychosocial position is now so well known as to appear trite, particularly to its opponents, it's not often appreciated how closely the UFO and Abduction experiences come to their traditional predecessors in religion and folklore. The lengthy comparisons of a few years ago of alien abduction investigators and medieval witch-hunters by James Pontolillo and others, while immensely controversial, were almost literally accurate in their analysis of the relationship between the two. In itself, this was not particularly revolutionary. Janet and Colin Bord in the 1970s researched the similarities between the entities reported from UFOs, and the demons of medieval theology, based



on their reading of Nicholas of Remy's 16th century *Demonlatry*. In confirmation of their research, they note that during a conversation with six alien beings a composer from Malvesi, in Narbonne, France, had on 12 December 1987, one of the beings in answer to his question 'So you're extraterrestrials then?' replied 'ciel, demon' (sky, demon). 'The use of the word demon goes some way towards confirming what some researchers have long suspected: that the UFO entity phenomenon is not peculiar to the twentieth century but has occurred throughout history, the origins and intentions of the entities being understood in accordance with the dominant beliefs of the age.' ² Pontolillo, however, took the

Anglia during the Interregnum, cases which parallel the contemporary abduction experience, though with the obvious difference that these lack the technological imagery characteristic of the Twentieth century.

The origin of some demonic encounters in visions during a hypnagogic state is apparently born out in Sterne's description of Anne Boreham's initiation into their company. Boreham 'confessed that as she awoke out of a dream she saw ugly men (as she thought) a fighting, and asked them why they fought, who answered that they would fight for all her, and then one vanished away, and then came to her into bed, and had the use of her body.' ³

There are obviously problems to accepting such statements, along with other confessions from the accused at face value, due to the immense physical and psychological stresses under which those accused were placed by their judicial tormentors in order to extract confessions of guilt. Although torture was not used in England, and so the number of witchcraft cases was consequently small, nevertheless coercive measures such as walking and watching – by which Hopkins and his cohorts denied the accused witches of sleep – as well as leading questions and the unbearable psychological pressures to confess,

means that it's possible that some, at least, of the testimony obtained from suspected witches was formed, consciously or unconsciously, to conform to the witchfinders' own prejudices and expectations. Nevertheless, Boreham's statement, along with other 'spectral evidence', certainly suggests the origins of some witchcraft cases in encounters with sexually predatory incubi and succubi, demonic encounters of much the same type with the equally sexually predatory aliens, which also rape their human victims. The only difference here is that these latter incubi violate their victims on high-tech dissection tables, rather than their own beds. Even

the statements given by the violating entities as explanations are essentially the same. Boreham's statement that they fought 'for all of her' certainly compares with Streiber's statement that they 'did have a right' to carry out their experiments, and indeed Fort's own oft-repeated dictum of an putative alien presence on Earth, 'I think we are property.'

The parallels with the Greys of the Abduction phenomenon become even closer when one considers that the familiars who accompanied these witches were similarly diminutive. Elizabeth Hubbard confessed that 'she had three things' come to her in the likeness of children', ⁴ while Edward Wright similarly possessed two imps like little boys. ⁵ Of course, elves had long been imagined to be diminutive in size, and Lord Berners' 1534 translation of the fourteenth century French *Huon of Bordeaux* describes Oberon, the fairy king as about the 'but of iii fote' in height. ⁶ Given the association between fairies and witchcraft, it was to be expected that the attendant imps should similarly be envisaged as lacking adult human stature. Even the paradoxically asexual nature of the attacking entities themselves is described in Sterne's case studies, just as modern Abduction narratives describe similar highly sexed, but curiously sexless aliens. One of Sterne's victims, Bush of Banton, confessed that Satan appeared by her bedside as a young black man – traditionally the colour of evil, but not yet the Grey of the Abductionists – 'but could not perform nature as man', ⁷ while Anne Crick stated that 'the Devill had the use of her body, but she said she could not tell whether he performed nature or not.' ⁸ This latter, though, could have been due to the strong social pressures against confessing intimate – and in this case, unnatural – sexual activities in public, as Crick stated clearly that 'she could not confess before much company.' ⁹ Although these encounters probably didn't arise from the deliberate use of hallucinogens as a means of altering consciousness, nevertheless they bear a strong similarity to the 'machine elves' produced by the DMT experience, suggesting that they may indeed be autonomous, but alienated sections of the human psyche, rather than objective, corporeal entities. ¹⁰



comparison one step further to include the conduct of the Abduction researchers themselves, presenting an image of their activities, including the willingness to inflict emotional pain on the victims of such supernatural visitations, which the Abduction researchers naturally found abhorrent. Nevertheless, the similarities between these witch-hunters, past and present, are very strong and can provide profound insights into the nature of the phenomenon. For example, the writings of John Sterne, the friend and fellow witchfinder of the notorious Matthew Hopkins, contains numerous cases of witchcraft they discovered during their reign of terror in East

As for the confused, and often tortured emotional state of many abductees, this too is paralleled by Sterne's description of the motivations of the purported witches victimised by himself and Hopkins. According to Sterne, the Devil carefully observed his victims to entrap them when they were psychologically most vulnerable, 'as when any fall into a passionate sorrow, accompanied with solitarinesse for some losse, a husband, wife, children or such like, the Devil offers himself to comfort such in their sorrowfull melancholy mood.' ¹¹ Of course, to contemporary Christian fundamentalists searching for real, present day servants of Satan, such melancholy behaviour and the avoidance of human company is very much a symptom of occult involvement, rather than a symptom of a disturbed emotional state that may make an already vulnerable person particular susceptible to the delusion that he or she has been violated and entrapped by predatory supernatural beings.

Here Sterne also has a few valuable lessons for today's Satan hunters, though his comments, from the background of an explicit believer in the reality of the Devil's agents on Earth, actually corroborate instead the conclusions of the Sceptics. Rather than demonstrating the fire-and-brimstone sermon as a true path to Christian salvation, Sterne describes instances where it has had the opposite effect on its audience: 'For I have heard many of them say, that the Devil hath inticed them to witchcraft by some sermons they have preached; as when ministers will preach of the power of the devil, and his tormenting the wicked' after which the Devil approached the novice witch, 'asking them, How do you think to be saved?' before promising them that if they gave their soul to him, he would free them of the torments of hell. As a result of this, according to Sterne, '(i)gnorant people have been thus seduced.' ¹²

Contemporary sceptical opponents of the Satanism scare have come to similar conclusions, noting that children with low self-esteem may similarly become involved in pseudo-Satanic crime through an overwhelming belief in their own evil derived from an authoritarian, punitive background in which religious threats are used

to humiliate and control them. The American sceptical sociologist, Jeffrey S. Victor, noted that 'Adolescents who see themselves as being "evil" create a psychological environment consistent with their self-concept. They see the world as they see themselves, a place where malicious evil is more genuine than compassion.' ¹³ One example where a belief in their own evil has led to the development of pseudo-Satanic beliefs, is that of Christina who used 'satanism (sic) to rebel against her parents' religion ... When her mother asked her directly about her satanic beliefs, Christina told her mother that there was nothing good in the world that was why she liked satanism (sic).' ¹⁴ Moreover, Victor elsewhere records instances where suspected Satanic criminals have been captured using material from the manuals produced by the Satan hunters themselves as the basis for their perverted beliefs. The conclusion to be drawn here seems to be that an exaggerated, repressive emphasis on Satan and the power of evil, far from drawing people to the saving power of Christ, produces its demonic opposite. As a result, Christian ministers would be best advised to avoid too much hell-fire and damnation preaching in favour of other, more positive aspects of the religion. Unfortunately it's a message the fundamentalist Satan hunters don't seem to have received, particularly those fixated on the supposedly demonic influence of Harry Potter.

Back in the world of Ufology, although no doubt the Abduction researchers currently interrogating their percipients for details of their supernatural assaults would be shocked and deny the comparison, nevertheless they do seem to be recapitulating the aims and approach of the medieval witch hunters in their pursuit of technological incubi. The main difference between the two groups of inquisitors is that the medieval and Early Modern witch hunters acted as the agents of a persecuting culture attempting to re-establish threatened societal and religious norms. The Abductionists, on the other hand, far from being the agents of the state or established church, perceive themselves as essentially opposed, or at least marginalized, by the establishment, and in the case of 'Dark Side' ufology with

its mythology of government complicity and alien conspiracies, are on the contrary deliberately acting against its interests to expose it as a manipulative and persecuting order.

As for the Abductees themselves, their experiences also recapitulate the experiences of the medieval saints, some of whose torments also seem to have arisen from sleep paralysis. The 1438 English translation of the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, describes such a nocturnal Satanic assault on Saint Edmund. One night the saint fell asleep at his books before he could meditate on the Passion of Christ. As a result, 'the feende that had gret envy to hym laye so hevye on Seynt Edmond that he had no power to blesse hym with the ryght honde ner with the lyft honde.' ¹⁵ Nevertheless, the saint was able to triumph over the adversary when he finally remembered, by the grace of God, Christ's passion, at which the Devil 'fylle downe anone fro hym.' ¹⁶ Furthermore, the saint was able to gain from the Devil information on how best to defend himself from further Satanic assault. This was indeed meditation on the Passion, which granted anyone so occupied immunity from the Devil's attacks. ¹⁷

It has been stated that the Abduction phenomenon has part of its origins in late Twentieth – early Twenty-first century victim culture, and there is also an element of this in the cult of the medieval saints. Apart from the severe asceticism practiced by them, their saintliness was also vindicated by the spiritual and psychological privations they experienced, such as demonic assault. Although such assaults could continue throughout the saint's life, his sanctity guaranteed that he would be able to fend them off, and even provide comfort and exorcism to those who also suffered. Indeed, his ability to protect himself from such attacks through his personal religious devotion itself vindicated his saintliness, marking him out as one of the elect rather than a demoniac requiring the mystical aid of a true saint.

The Abduction culture also stresses its adherents' status as the valorous victims of supernatural assault, during which they may also receive messages of spiritual import. Moreover, as with the 'holy anorexia' and demonic

1. See: Steve Moore, review of *Secret Cipher of the Ufonauts*, by Alan H Greenfield, Illuminet Press, 1995, in *Fortean Times* no. 81, June-July 1995, p. 62

2. Janet and Colin Bord, *Life Beyond Planet Earth, Man's contacts with space people*, Grafton, 1991, p.115

3. J. Sterne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, 1648, repr. University of Exeter, 1973, p.32

4. Sterne, *op. cit.*, p.26

5. Sterne, *op. cit.*, p. 26

6. G. Edward. *Hobgoblin and Sweet Pucj; fairy names and natures*, Geoffrey Bles, 1974, p. 168

7. Sterne, *op. cit.*, p.29

8. Sterne, *op. cit.*, p.30

9. Sterne, *op. cit.*, p. 30

10. See: R. Rickard, 'Watch the Sky-Watchers' review of Paul Devereux and Peter Brookesmith, *UFOs and Ufology*, Blandford, 1997, in *Fortean Times*, 106, January 1998, p. 55

11. Rickard, *op. cit.*, p.55

12. Rickard, *op. cit.*, p. 59

13. J. S. Victor, *Satanic Panic; the creation of a contemporary legend*. Open Court, 1993, pp. 148-9.

14. Victor, *op. cit.*, p. 149, citing A. M. Spelz, 'Treating Adolescent Satanism in Art Therapy', *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 17, Summer 1990, pp.147-155

15. N. F. Blake, *Middle English Religious Prose*, Edward Arnold, London, 1972, p.168.

16. Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 168

17. Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 168

torments of the medieval saints, some researchers into the Abduction phenomenon have detected a similar aetiology behind their supernatural persecutions in hysteria and various dissociative disorders, often expressed in trickery, such as those of poltergeists, fraudulent mediums or shamans. In this view, such experiences are symptomatic of a spectrum of hysterical disorders of which Multiple Personality Disorder and Munchausen's Syndrome are the most extreme. The classic example of the latter in conventional Western religion is probably Benedetta Carlini, a seventeenth century Italian nun who wounded herself in order to fake the stigmata, as well as suffering demonic attack, as well as possession by Jesus Christ and a cherub,

vival, *Stars and Rumours of Stars*, in which stars were seen to accompany the preaching of Mrs. Mary Jones, 'the Welsh seeress' in Egryn. It is possible, however, to find episodes in 19th century folklore, which also prefigure the 'interrupted journey' of the Abduction narratives and encounters with sexually alluring, but dangerous, supernatural entities. In 19th century Shetland, for example, the fairies, as well as being short, were described as dressing uniformly in dark grey, ²⁰ a feature shared by the machine elves of the contemporary technological psyche. Unlike these later creatures, however, they were somewhat more colourful, with yellow complexions, red eyes, green teeth and natural brown wool mittens. ²¹

The yellowish complexions also provide a further similarity with some of the early Ufonauts, who were often described as having a swarthy or oriental appearance.

Furthermore, in the 1870s two young men, C. and S., from Deerness in Orkney were returning to the farm where they worked one night through a low valley when they met two girls wearing what looked like white night dresses. When they attempted to embrace them, however, the two girls vanished, one appearing to evaporate into thin air, while the other melted into the ground. Another even-

as prefiguring the similarly glamorous alien women of the Contactee era, such as Aura Rhanes.

Moreover, while the appearance of the flying light is clearly related to the visions of stars documented in the Welsh revival, it is also curiously reminiscent of the UFO visions of the Twentieth Century, such as the flying light apparently produced by Paul Solem before reporters in Prescott, Arizona, in 1969. Solem had experienced his own extraterrestrial epiphany in 1948 when he heard the mental message, 'We are from another planet. You will hear from us later', as three flying discs flew over his head. This initial telepathic contact was succeeded by a later meeting with a 'Venusian angel.' Unlike the two Orkneymen, who felt this was a personal message meant only for themselves, Solem believed his experience was of far wider import and began addressing Indian meetings during which he prophesied an approaching Day of Purification, in which the faithful would be taken by the aliens to safety and happiness on other worlds, while those not so fortunate would perish on Earth. ²³ The similarities between this, and other revivalist messages of an approaching apocalypse, are not coincidental, both deriving from an essentially religious impulse.

Other Contactees whose experiences paralleled that of the two Orkneymen included the Sicilian, Eugenio Siragusa, who heard an inner voice informing him of the 'mysteries of creation' after being struck by a brilliant ray of light emitted by a glowing object in 1951. After 11 years of this mental instruction, he was finally motivated in 1962 to drive to Mt. Etna to meet two silver clad figures with long blond hair who gave him a message of intergalactic love, fraternity and justice. Significantly, Siragusa received his extraterrestrial revelation while waiting at the bus stop for the morning trip to work. ²⁴ The gender of the extraterrestrials isn't noted, but it is significant that many of them, whatever their sex, wore their hair long and blond, or had a peculiar feminine appearance, a further parallel to the spectral girls seen by the Orkneymen.

The islanders' experience here and that of the 'inter-



Splenditello. ¹⁸ There is one difference, however. The Abductees are condemned to be perpetual, passive victims of their tormentors, unable to prevent or defend themselves from their assaults, unlike their medieval predecessors, though some writers on Abductions have produced their own solutions to this abject state, ranging from the caricature hats in tinfoil, to Greenfield's suggested magical techniques for warding off their attacks. ¹⁹

Elsewhere, Kevin and Sue McClure have discussed parallels between 19th century religious experience and that of contemporary ufology in his analysis of the 1905 Welsh religious re-

vival, when they were again passing through the same valley, a bright star, or ball of fire, came towards them. As it passed over their heads, they heard a voice coming from it, saying 'I'm sent.' This vision was so terrifying that C. collapsed to the ground, and took some time to recover. Thinking about it afterwards, however, the two young men considered it a sign 'not to associate with certain girls of dubious reputation.' ²² While the clerics of the Middle Ages would probably conclude that the vision of the two girls in their night attire were succubi, intent on using their sexual allure to ensure the young men's damnation, it's also possible to see them

rupted journey' may have their origins in the stresses and psychological states induced by a long, nocturnal journey, those of contemporary Abductees, like the islanders in the tale, taking place at night. The psychological stresses of a long journey through monotonous terrain can produce disorientation and trance-like states in travellers – horizon fatigue – and is recognised as particular hazard affecting visitors to the wilder parts of the Australian outback. Although Orkney isn't a barren, isolated, dangerous wilderness on a par with the Australian desert, the two Orkneymen were presumably also tired after a long day of hard agricultural work, and so may have been drifting towards a semi-trance-like state where unusual stimuli from their external environment could also generate bizarre imagery from within their own minds. The bright light they observed could have been a meteor, a briefly glimpsed part of the Aurora Borealis, or even an Earthlight, like those of Hessdalen on the other side of the North Sea, or perhaps the distorted light from a distant farm house. Whatever the precise origin, it may well be that this light, distorted by distance and fatigue, acted on the men's minds to produce a vision of supernatural imagery and import. The phrase 'I'm sent' suggests its origin in traditional religious beliefs regarding celestial omens as things literally sent from Heaven, while stars themselves have always been symbols of the mystic and numinous, either directly through astrology or through images of the Star of Bethlehem in the story of the Nativity. Thus, to religious percipients of such celestial prodigies these phenomena may automatically generate numinous feelings and imagery, thus accounting for the mystical, or supernatural content, of their visions.

Despite the parallels with medieval magic and witchcraft, there is one important point where the contemporary Abduction phenomenon differs considerably from its predecessors. While some contemporary ufologists and Abduction researchers strongly resist the idea that UFOs are anything except concrete, objectively real extraterrestrial spacecraft piloted by corporeal, organic beings, the churchmen of the Middle Ages, on the contrary, considered that some

demonic phenomena, at least, were illusory. The *Canon Episcopi*, for example, considered the belief that women rode out at night with Herodias as heretical, not that such a night flight objectively occurred. Similarly, the 15th Munich occult manuscript contains spells to produce the illusion of a mighty castle, 25 while a 12th century grimoire from Rheims included instructions for the summoning of an illusory boat or horse to convey the necromancer to whichever destination he desired. 26 It is possible here to speculate on possible connections between the sky ships of Magonia in 8th century France and these illusory vessels, crewed, according to the Munich manual, by spirits that were neither good nor evil, not in Hell or Heaven, 27 though it could simply come from the use of ships as a familiar and ready means of transport.

The medieval theologians formulated their views of the illusory nature of much supernatural phenomena for dogmatic reasons: demons, as God's creations, could not be seen to usurp the creative power of the Almighty, no matter how powerful they may have appeared. Such theological niceties have left contradictions in the texts. For example, if the ships or horses were illusory, it could be asked how they could be expected to convey someone anywhere. The answer to that may be that the mortal traveller aboard them either suffered further illusions of the journey to his destination, or perhaps really did go there, but during a fugue state brought on by his occult experiments, similar to the dissociative states during which Abductees and other experiencers have travelled far across America during UFO flaps. The description of such vessels in the Munich manuscript does suggest that the necromancer writing it was thinking primarily in terms of a solid vessel, which he then piously tried to reconcile with the church's doctrine of the illusory nature of demonic artefacts.

Nevertheless, regardless of the theological origins of their opinions, the medieval churchmen may have been substantially correct as to the illusory nature of many witches' Sabbaths. Gustav Henningsen has discussed the Sicilian fairy cult of the 'Ladies from Outside' – *Donas de Fueras* – as arising from a dissociative state in which its members compensated

for the privations of their poverty-stricken lives by imagining they travelled to feast with the Queen of the Fairies, in return gaining the power to heal, without objectively journeying to any such gathering. 28 This follows similar claims by Carlo Ginzburg in his study of the Benandanti in *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the 16th and 17th Centuries*. Even in the British Isles, some folk stories suggest this. The fifteenth century account of the exorcism of the fairy king Gwyn ap Nudd from Glastonbury Tor by the sixth-century saint Collen, which ends with the saint alone on the hill top, after Gwyn, his court and indeed his entire palace had vanished, suggests a visionary experience not unlike the grimoires' description of illusory magical castles produced by demons. If the UFO is merely an updated version of these supernatural flying ships, whose appearance has been modified in line to produce a suitable technological image of an advanced vehicle in line with the scientific culture of the Twentieth century, then it is more than reasonable to suppose that, as the medieval churchmen partly recognised, it similarly shares these ships' illusory nature.

Not all hypnogogic visions are necessarily malign, however. There was one episode, recorded in the 19th century by the folklorist, Robert Hunt, in which a frail old lady in Penberth Cove, Cornwall, sadly rendered bedridden, was entertained throughout the day 'day by day, and all day long' by the Small Folk, who 'were her only company.' 29 'No sooner was the old woman left alone that in they came and began their frolics, dancing over the rafters and the key-beams, swinging by the cobwebs like rope-dancers, catching the mice and riding them in and out through the holes in the thatch. When one party got tired another party came, and by daylight, and even by moonlight, the old bedridden creature never wanted amusement.' 30 The permanent confinement of the woman to her bed suggests that her visions were experienced, or partly experienced, while she was sleeping or dozing in hypnogogic state. It is possible here to catch a glimpse of a woman in very poor health, living in abject poverty, for whom, like the *Donas de Fueras*' visits to their fairy banquets, the

18. J. Schnabel, 'The Munch Bunch', in *Fortean Times*, no. 70, August-September 1993, pp. 23-29

19. Moore, *op. cit.*, p.62

20. E. W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland*, Batsford, 1975, p.42

21. E. W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland*, Batsford, 1975, p.42

22. E. W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland*, Batsford, 1975, p.98

23. Bord, *op. cit.*, p. 185

24. Bord, *op. cit.*, p. 173

25. R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, C.U.P., 1989, p.6.

26. R. Kieckhefer, *op. cit.*, p.158

27. R. Kieckhefer, *op. cit.*, p.169

28. G. Henningsen, 'The ladies from Outside: An Archaic Pattern of the Witches Sabbath', in B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (eds.) *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, O.U.P., 1990, pp. 191-218.

29. R. Hunt, *The Drolls, Traditions and Superstitions of Old Cornwall (Popular Superstitions of the West of England): First series: Giants, Fairies, Tregagle, Mermaids, Rocks, Lost cities, Fire Worship, Demons and Spectres*, Llanerch facsimile reprint of 1881, edition, Felinfach, 1993, p.120

30. R. Hunt, *op. cit.* same page

31. R. Hunt, *op. cit.* same page

32. E. Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures*, Penguin, 1959, p. 229

33. E. Conze, *op. cit.*, same page.



visionary games of her elfin companions were a welcome relief and compensation from the immense vicissitudes of a hard life.

It is a marked contrast to some of the other stories in which the fairies are responsible for the theft of goods and children from

humanity. The Abduction experience is probably too far gone, too deeply entrenched in the contemporary psyche for this, and the matrix of contemporary fears and terrors too extreme for this too occur. Nevertheless, this episode, and others like it from traditional

fairy lore do hold out the possibility of a return to a far more benign variety of ufological visionary experience.

It also suggests that Tibetan Buddhist doctrine as expressed in the *Bardo Thodol* also known in the West as *The Book of the Dead* (literal translation: *Liberation by Hearing in the After-Death Plane*) may also be substantially correct in ascribing the demons and monsters encountered after death not to objective spiritual entities, but as projections from the percipient's own mind: 'They terrify you beyond words, and yet it is you who have created them. Do

into a rainbow, and you will find yourself in paradise among the angels'.³³ In the case of living, secular encounters with the supernatural, such spiritual advice may be of little help, though it does reinforce the suggestion that such visions can be altered or modified to a more benign version by the percipient mastering his or her internal states. Otherwise, it offers the comfort that however disturbing the visions and their attendant horrors are, they are nevertheless illusions, which will pass, leaving the victim to carry on with their life, hopefully unscarred by the incident.

Thus an analysis of the parallels between the contemporary Abduction phenomenon and its predecessors in medieval and Early Modern spirituality and magical beliefs strongly indicates that both share a common origin in internal experiences and hallucinations arising from dissociative or otherwise disturbed mental states. The theologians of these epochs partly recognised this, though their continued belief in objectively real occult forces responsible for these illusions, which were nevertheless capable of real corporeal and spiritual harm, resulted in the deaths of countless thousands accused of such crimes. While the worldview and methodologies adopted by contemporary Christian fundamentalist witch hunters and Abduction researchers may differ from their medieval predecessors, nevertheless their activities recapitulate extremely closely the medieval and Early Modern inquisitors' attempts to root out supernatural evil and their human victims and agents, the 'women who copulate with the Devil', in the words of the Anglo-Saxon witchcraft legislation. An awareness of the essentially illusory nature of the experience, and the dangers of emphasizing the power of evil, is a powerful weapon for combating the extremely harmful claims of both types of modern day witchfinders. Such an approach is no doubt disappointing to supporters of the ETH, for whom Close Encounters are evidence of objectively real encounters with alien entities, though it also suggests that such experiences, by virtue of their internal nature, thus partake of the rich and complex psychology at the heart of shamanic contact with the transcendent other.



their mortal neighbours. Possibly the benign nature of the fairies, who came to entertain this poor lady resulted from the percipient's own good nature. The woman herself is described as 'a good old creature' who, despite her privations, nevertheless enjoyed the support of her relations, 'who dropped in once a day, rendered her the little aid she required, and left food by the bedside.'³¹ Certainly her recorded good nature, and those of the creatures she observed while in a trance state, who came to keep her company, suggest that the content and character of the creatures produced by the subconscious partake or are strongly informed by the character and the mental state of their unconscious creators. Kevin McClure has suggested in the past that if somehow the Abduction hysteria, and social and psychological tensions and fears which inform and support it were somehow removed, then it's possible that the Close Encounter experience itself would revert to its earlier form in which a traveller, late at night, encountered a spaceman on a lonely road with a message for

not give in to your fright, resist your mental confusion! All this is unreal, and what you see are the contents of your own mind in conflict with itself.'³² Although the state of the percipients in these circumstances differs considerably – those encountering witches, angels and Ufonauts being very much alive, rather than dead or dying as in the case of the audience to whom the *Bardo Thodol* is addressed, nevertheless it suggests that these visions do originate in subconscious dissociative states. In the latter instance it may well have arisen in the further breakdown of neurological functions in the dying brain, as controversially suggested some years ago by Sue Blackmore. For Tibetan Buddhists, this revelation is liberating as seeing through the troubling visions they may face after death and recognising them for what they are offers the opportunity for the deceased to gain paradise: 'What you see here is but the reflection of the contents of your own mind in the mirror of the Void. If at this point you should manage to understand that, the shock this insight will stun you, your subtle body will disperse

Alien Mimicry in Popular Culture

Michael McHugh

If aliens ever came to earth to trade, raid or simply take pictures for Galactic Geographic magazine, it always seemed to me that they would do so by disguising themselves and their technology in such a way that they simply blended in with the natives as much as possible. Either that, or they would hire locals to do much of the work for them and act as guides and interpreters. Even on earth, people who need to work or do business in foreign countries do this all the time, and also try to learn something of the native language and customs before they go.

No matter whether their intentions were sinister, benevolent or neutral, they would try to mimic humans at least to some degree, simply in order to carry out their tasks without being disturbed. In the TV mini-series *V*, for example, the reptilian Visitors walk around at first wearing human suits

and talking of peace and love, although their disguise wears thin very quickly when it becomes clear that their real intentions are to strip the earth of its resources and enslave or exterminate the population.

This is one of the main themes running through science fiction books and movies. Aliens who try to mimic humanity are never very successful for long, either because they are so much worse than humans or sometimes - so much better. Their deficiencies are usually on the social and emotional side, since they are often shown as cultures with highly developed mental powers and

technologies, but as moral and emotional idiots, with no more conscience or empathy than sociopathic career criminals. Their relationships and interpersonal skills are so stunted and undeveloped that one wonders whether such a society could long survive, since its members are so wooden, robotic and zombie-like, usually motivated by fear and power considerations.

The aliens depicted in the *Cocoon* movies are one exception to this, and seem to have social, emotional and empathic qualities that match their advanced technology, but my guess would be that in popular culture, the aliens from imbalanced, paranoid and aggressive cultures, with stunted personalities and severe psychosocial deficiencies heavily outweigh the healthy, benevolent, well-adjusted ones. It was a running commentary on the fears and disappointments of the 20th Century, and on the loss of faith in humanity in the wake of two world wars in thirty years and horrors like Auschwitz and Hiroshima. There was a very common assumption that in an advanced technocratic society, the human personality would become narrower, less individualistic and emotional and more like the machines that society now relied on for everything. If the aliens of the movies were just a anti-utopian vision of what humans feared their future would be like, then they saw themselves evolving into highly intelligent drones and automatons. Moreover, virtually none of the alien societies were



free and democratic, but usually an authoritarian or totalitarian system of some kind.

Three classic films immediately came to mind when I thought of this genre of aliens trying to blend in among humanity: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *Village of the Damned* (1960). One reason I chose these as examples is because they reached a huge audience in America though television, which always had regular slots for science fiction and horror movies, like the famous Creature Feature on WOR TV in New York. Obviously, Hollywood aimed most of these movies at a juvenile audience and whole generations grew up watching them again and again

lot to do with this, of course, and perhaps it was only coincidental that the first big UFO wave was in 1947, the same year that regular commercial television began broadcasting in America.

While not an actual war movie, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was made during the Korean War, which is long-forgotten now but at the time seemed like the prelude to a third world war. For Americans on the political right, like the McCarthyites, it was also an extremely frustrating war, since it seemed likely to end in a stalemate. Americans in general were used to having their wars end in complete victory, and their greatest victory of all in 1945 was still a very recent memory, so it was a

bitter pill to swallow that the country could not work its will in a place like Korea. This was not because Americans are a naturally war-like people. If anything, they are natural isolationists who would prefer not to be involved with the outside world in any way, and it took extreme provocations to before they joined in the world wars. Once they are at war, though, they insist on complete victory, and if this is impossible prefer to do nothing at all.

Total victory was no longer possible in a world where other countries also had nuclear weapons. The

hydrogen bomb, first tested in 1952, effectively meant destructive power without limit, and thus rendered traditional concepts of victory not only impossible but meaningless. General Douglas MacArthur had wanted to escalate the Korean War to the nuclear level, but President Truman fired him - and privately called him insane - for which he suffered the rabid backlash of the right wing and the McCarthyites. For years, the Democratic Party was scared by the viciousness of the attacks, and presidents like John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were extremely edgy about right wing accusations about 'losing' Cuba and Vietnam the way Truman had

'lost' China and failed to liberate North Korea. It was probably the most dangerous time of the Cold War, except for the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and if Stalin had made a move in Europe, then the U.S. really would have used its nuclear weapons.

This was the atmosphere in 1951 when *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was released, and under the circumstances, making a movie like this was courageous. It was an ugly and anxious time in American history, and science fiction was one of the safer ways to get dissenting views across. Even sober and hard-headed types like George Kennan thought world war might break out at any time, so it is no surprise that many people were hoping for some act of divine intervention or a helping hand from friendly aliens to prevent civilization from self-destructing. The horrors of World War II were still fresh in everyone's mind, and there was more support in America at the time for a strong United Nations organization to keep the peace than exists today.

This is the message that the benevolent alien Klattu wants to deliver when he lands his flying saucer in Washington D.C. on a summer's day in the Cold War. If humans do not surrender their power to make war to some higher authority, then they are going to destroy themselves, an idea even some presidents like Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt would have agreed with.

Klattu is everything we would expect from a diplomatic representative of a higher civilization: polished, urbane, cultivated, speaking like the dean of the finest English department in the land. In this movie, the humans come off badly in comparison to the alien, and appear as cynical and self-interested, or paranoid, aggressive and militaristic, while Klattu looks like he would make a good leader for earth. From the very start of movie, when a trigger-happy soldier shoots up a communication device that Klattu intended to give to the president, we can tell his mission will go badly. The elite will not listen to him so he decides to escape from the hospital where the government has him confined and live incognito among the common people--in order to get a better understanding of humanity and perhaps decide if it is



Klattu leaves the people of earth with a simple choice: either give up the power to make aggressive war and threaten each other with nukes or face total obliteration at the hands of Gort.

on TV, but *Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Children of the Damned* were also serious 'message pictures', using the theme of ETs mainly as a hook to get the attention of the audience. I have no way of guessing the actual number of people who saw these, but it is safe to say that anyone in America who had even a remote interest in such subjects had a chance to see them, not just once but many times. If aliens really were visiting earth, it was the worst kept secret in history, and even among my grandparent's generation, it was already a commonplace that UFOs were real and that such sightings were nothing unusual. TV had a

a species worth saving.

As we might expect, he finds quite a variety among the American public, including a war widow and her son who are sympathetic characters and try to help his efforts. On the other hand, her boyfriend wants to turn him in for the reward and imagines himself as the biggest man in the country when he gets credit for it. The landlady of the house where he is staying believes that the alien is not an ET at all, but really a Russian spy sent to lull America into giving up its nuclear weapons, and the theme of suspicion, paranoia and tension runs throughout the whole movie. Probably Klattu's greatest ally is Professor Lieberman (i.e. Einstein), who believes he is an alien and wants to help in his efforts to stop the arms race and slide towards global destruction. The real Einstein, of course, had similar views, as did many nuclear scientists, but as a Jewish émigré, a socialist and a pacifist, the national security establishment never trusted him and the right wing targeted him with the usual kinds of attacks. Essentially, Klattu is Professor Einstein - or a WASPish version of him - delivering the same message that war was obsolete. He is not simply a do-gooder, however, strumming a guitar and singing of peace, love and tofu, but has considerable power to back up his words.

If ETs really do exist, it is a good bet that they have developed intelligent machines, and in this case, Klattu's people have developed benevolent robots like Gort, who keep the peace by threatening to rain total destruction on the heads of anyone who commits aggression. Gort, in fact, has the power to shut off all the electricity on earth whenever he chooses, and to bring Klattu back to life after a soldier shoots him dead. He is a serious peace officer, and one that humanity would be well advised not to fool with. In the end, Klattu leaves the people of earth with a simple choice: either give up the power to make aggressive war and threaten each other with nukes or face total obliteration at the hands of Gort.

Needless to say, it is not an optimistic movie, and states rather bluntly that this is the only kind of language humans understand. Whether any international organization formed by a species as defective as this one would

work as intended or simply become a new kind of tyranny is problematic at best. The movie solves the problem by putting the real power over war in the hands of intelligent machines, but none of those existed in 1951 or even in 2001, for that matter. One suspects that if it is ever intended, it will only result in an arms race of ever more intelligent robots, as well as robot-destroying weapons systems designed to take out the other side's technology.

On the surface at least, the Eisenhower Era after the end of the Korean War and McCarthyism was one of bland conformity, which as we know now, is exactly what the president wanted it to be. There was a reason he spent so much time playing golf, since he calculated that it would create a more relaxed atmosphere, in which people would not be so anxious that the world would end at any moment. There were still crises, to be sure, like Suez in 1956 and the Sputnik panic (and UFO wave) a year later, and always over Berlin, which served as periodic reminders that the Cold War could revive at any time. Somehow, though, Eisenhower made it seem less dangerous or at least less immediate, even though he could be quite ruthless as well, such as approving coups against the governments of Iran, Indonesia and Guatemala by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Compared to what came before and after, the years 1945-73 were exceptionally prosperous ones in America, and even today, the 1950s are still remembered nostalgically as *Happy Days*. The economic downturns were less severe than in the 1930s or post-1973 period, the middle class was growing, and real poverty seemed confined to groups that had always been marginalized like blacks, Indians and poor whites in the South and Appalachia.

The conventional wisdom held that an expanding economy and a benevolent welfare state with new civil rights laws would lift even the boats at the bottom eventually, although there was no such optimism in the years after Vietnam and the economic decline of the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1950s, though, the general sense was that mass poverty and deprivation would never again be a problem for the majority, as it certainly had been in the Great

Depression.

Nevertheless, there were many hidden tensions and anxieties in the Affluent Society that would explode to the surface in the next decade. Popular books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1951) and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) held that Americans had lost their traditional individuality and independence and become a mass consumer society with a culture of dull, suburban conformity. The threat was no so much from little green men as little gray men and yes men, serving the giant corporations and bureaucracies that really governed the country. For a populist culture that had always inordinately valued self-reliance, rugged individualism and self-sufficiency, it was a bitter pill to swallow, almost as heretical and difficult to accept as the idea that America could not defeat any other nation in battle of that it was no longer a can-do country. Even Eisenhower warned of the military-industrial complex before he left office and the threat it posed to the republic.

The great American middle class, the 'booboisie' as H.L. Mencken called it, has always had a masochistic streak, and a seemingly endless appetite for books and movies that portray it as a bunch of stooges in service to the rich and powerful - bigoted, semi-literate clods in love with their alarm clocks and refrigerators. This was true in the time of Mark Twain, and was never more true than in the 1950s, when the middle class was expanding at a record pace. In addition to Riesman and Whyte, it was reading articles like 'Must You Conform?' and Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, which portrayed a middle class that no longer even had any idea of what it wanted unless some advertising agency told it what to want.

Something about all this social criticism struck a nerve in a deeper way than all the right-wing hysteria about Communist plots to take over the government and fluoridate the water supply never quite did. In a country with such a large and relatively well off middle class, Communism had no chance of becoming a mass movement in America, as it had been in the 1930s, but it was also clear that that the old small town,

The American middle class has always had a masochistic streak, and a seemingly endless appetite for books and movies that portray it as a bunch of stooges in service to the rich and powerful

small producer economy was finished once and for all. The new middle class in the suburbs depended on big organizations for its livelihood - big government, big military, big business and big labor - and this led to a libertarian backlash in the 1960s and afterwards. The Organization Men were anxious and alienated, fearful about lost individuality, creativity and spontaneity, a manipulated, managed public whose job was simply to consume and let the experts run things. The danger was an internal kind of totalitarianism, in which a dehumanized population simply went along with whatever the experts, managers and bureaucrats decided.

The most horrendous example of Organization Man was

heading in the same direction, but now armed with nuclear weapons, and many of the young of the 1960s were determined that they would never be 'Good Germans' and 'cheerful robots', and would not obey or cooperate with any directives from above they considered immoral.

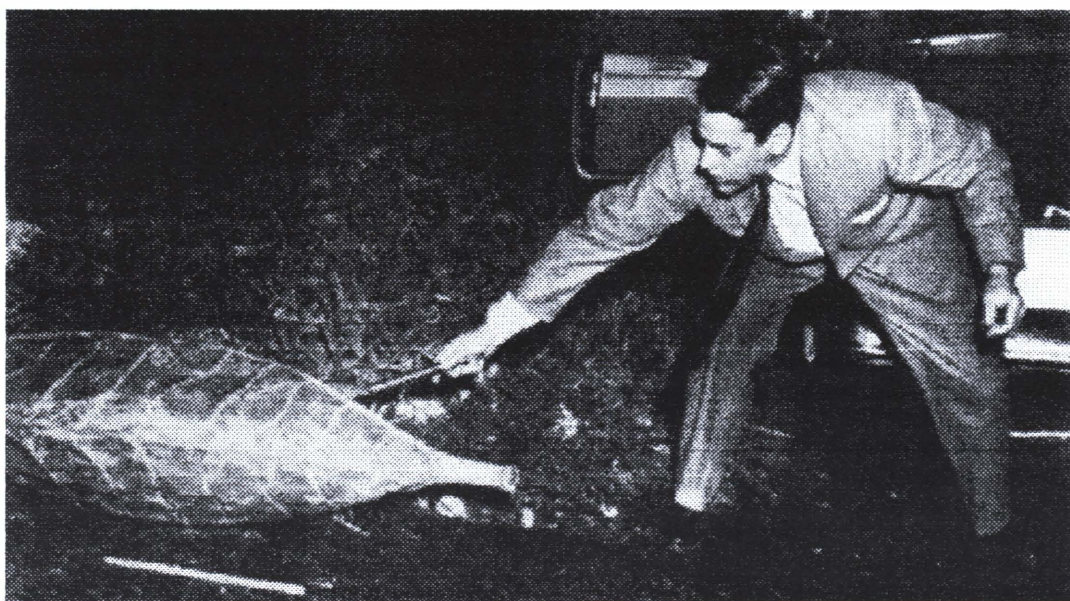
The truth about the Nazis was different from what they said at their trials, however, and perhaps even more depressing than the robot thesis. Many of them were actually fanatics and ideologues who truly believed Hitler's ideas that the Aryans were the master race and responsible for all human progress, rather than simply machines who executed any instructions given to them. Men like Eichmann, in fact, were genu-

ine zeal for the organizational mission.

The aliens in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* are not fanatics like this at all, and in fact are about the most utterly alien, inhuman creatures ever portrayed in a movie. After all, they were simply spores that drifted around in space until they took root in a farmer's field by accident, and did not represent an advanced civilization of any kind. The pod creatures were not spaceship builders, but simply The Blob in human form; human bodies with the personalities of spores, and had no more humanity than fungi or viruses. This made them all the more truly frightening. Although they still looked human and could imitate human communication and inter-

action, they totally lacked emotion, individuality or desire of any kind, except to survive and create more things like themselves - creatures without love or hate, enthusiasm or excitement.

While the *Body Snatchers* attempt to mimic human emotion, they are not very good at it, and their friends and relatives see through the act very quickly. Even a small boy can tell that the creature acting like his mother really was not her. The only defense the aliens really have is that the other humans will not really believe something like this could



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still recent in people's memories when *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* came out in 1956. Americans still remembered that the Nazis in World War II had always denied individual responsibility for any of their actions, and in the war crimes trials afterwards had invariably repeated that they were 'just following orders'. One school of thought, promulgated by writers like Hannah Arendt, was that mass murderers like Adolf Eichmann were banal; simply dull, plodding automatons and bureaucrats, carrying out whatever they had been programmed to do, without a hint of originality or individuality. There was a fear that all of humanity was

ine enthusiasts for genocide, who strove not merely to follow orders but to exceed them, and often took the initiative in the absence of instructions. In his case, he continued the extermination right up to the end, even when his superiors recognized the war was clearly lost and ordered him to stop. There were many like him, who kept up Hitler's work of destruction even after Hitler himself was no longer able to give the orders. So while it is true that the Nazis relied on large-scale industry and organization to carry out their atrocities, it was also the case that the people who got ahead in these organizations were not merely robots but true believers who showed genu-

happen until it is too late, and thus they are able to take over the town of Santa Mira, California and turn all the inhabitants into pod creatures, except for a few holdouts. Their main goal is to use the town as a base and expand the region under their control by sending seed pods out in all directions, and only by accident are their plans discovered and the authorities alerted. At first, no one would believe Dr. Miles Binnell, the lone human survivor of Santa Mira, until a truck driver from there crashes into a bus and is found covered with the alien seed pods.

Interestingly, in the remakes of this movie in 1978 and 2002, the aliens win, which may

indicate a certain decline of optimism in American society from even the cautious and limited level of this bleak 1956 film. Dr. Binnell is a voice crying in the wilderness of a mass society that neither believes him nor cares to listen to his story about how his small town was taken over by monsters.

If the traditional values and virtues of small town American were fast disappearing, then, it was not clear what was to replace them. In the case of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the answer would seem to be: nothing. The Body Snatches had no culture, no ideology, no great plans for the future, nothing at all, really, except the will to survive and continue to take up space. Although they felt superior to humans, then did not even desire power or conquest, but simply expanded their domain out of instinct. Any world these zombies and couch potatoes controlled would have been a barren one, and it is difficult to imagine how they would have been able to make enough effort to feed themselves and keep the lights on.

The generation that experienced the Great Depression and World War II was determined that the next generation would never have to go through anything like that again, although as we have seen, they felt great tension and anxiety about the type of society they were building. In the postwar years, America and all the other Western nations were riding the wave of an economic boom, and the kids grew up in far more egalitarian and affluent societies than ever existed before. Education expanded at all levels and was not simply a rich boys' club as it had been in the past, and even the children of farmers and workers could now aspire to a university education and a ticket into the middle class. The other side of the coin was a building resentment against the young that finally boiled over in the 1960s.

Supposedly, the kids had become spoiled brats, and very arrogant as well, thinking themselves superior to the older generation because they had more education and economic opportunity. They had been given everything and still wanted more, or as Richard Nixon said, they had been given too much, too quickly, and this had weakened them. Youth

showed no gratitude to its elders for all the sacrifices made on its behalf, and had become soft, self-centered and self-indulgent, taking everything for granted and now demanding the impossible.

A generation gap of this magnitude had never existed in the past, since children simply inherited the same status as social class as their parents and rarely had the opportunity to change it. The fear and suspicion of the young that was already increasing in the 1950s was not simply about their clothes and tastes in music, but really a resentment of the fact that they had more money and leisure time than ever before, hence more opportunities to get into trouble. Never before had there been so many middle class young, at least among whites in America, and society did not adjust well to it. Movies like *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, both made in 1955, reflected this growing fear that the young were getting out of control, although *Blackboard Jungle* was still a more traditional movie, set in an inner city school among teenagers who were obviously lower class. Their type of rebellion and delinquency was already a cliché in the 1930s or even in the Progressive Era of the early-1900s, although the 1950s version was set to rock and roll music.

Rebel Without A Cause broke new ground, since its setting was among middle class, suburban white kids, whose anger and rebellion was not caused by economic deprivation, and therefore mystified the older generation. If they already had everything, then what more did they want? It was a frequent question in the 1960s.

Before World War II, the middle class was only about 20% of the population at most, and the generation of that time was determined to enter its ranks, while at the same time worried about the consequences. In America at least, crime, violence and sociopathic behavior had always been associated with the lower classes, blacks, immigrants in the cities and of course, the frontier. The new middle class delinquents, however, did not quite understand themselves why they were so alienated, except a vague sense that something was missing from their lives, either love or personal fulfillment or simply a purpose beyond mere consumption. It is pos-

sible that they had too much in the material sense, but too little of the spiritual kind, and like their parents, felt like prisoners in a blandly conformist society.

In *Village of the Damned*, some unknown alien civilization puts all the women of Midwich, England (or Midwich, California in the 1995 remake) to sleep, and they find out they have all been impregnated. In due course, they all deliver perfect, beautiful infants, with blond hair and blue eyes, who mature very rapidly. Soon it is clear that the kids are geniuses with powerful telepathic abilities, and not at all like the other children. In fact, they are like a military unit with a leader, and although they do well in school, the little fiends are also sadists and sociopaths, who destroy anyone who gets in their way and do not seem bothered by it at all. It is never really clear who sent them or why, but it does not matter since they are clearly a threat to the world and lack the capacity for normal human ethics and social interaction. They are brilliant monsters, and the society they would create is a total reversal of the norm, in which the young control everything and adults are their slaves. They are spoiled and arrogant little Nazis, who want what they want when they want it, or, as Jim Morrison sang not too many years later: "We want the world and we want it - NOW."

The advanced civilization that created the little brutes evidently had some serious flaws in its production and distribution system, and only understood the forms of human life and culture, but not the substance. Right from the start, it sent some of its units into regions where the natives were instantly suspicious of women who gave birth to white, Nordic-looking infants and exterminated them on the spot. The Russians attempted to use their kids as weapons in the Cold War and gave them advanced training, but finally had to nuke them when they realized they could not be controlled. The British eliminated their kids in a more typically British way, with cleverness and economy of force. Their teacher knows how to shield his mind from their telepathic probes, at least long enough to carry a bomb into the classroom and take out both himself and the aliens with

Dr. Binnell is a voice crying in the wilderness of a mass society that neither believes him nor cares to listen to his story about how his small town was taken over by monsters.

minimal collateral damage.

From the alien point of view, though, the conclusion must be one of serious mission failure. Whatever their plan was, either to establish a new ruling elite on earth or set up bases under an advance guard of an invasion, the children they sent were too flawed to complete it. These aliens were not skillful at concealing their true natures and intentions, and gave the humans the opportunity to destroy them before they could accomplish anything.

In the 1963 sequel to the movie, *Children of the Damned*, the aliens have evidently learned from their mistakes and sent children who are not so obviously maladjusted. This time, they use their psychic powers only against people who are a threat to them, or military and intelligence types who try to employ them in the development of more destructive weapons. As in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the aliens are milder and less paranoid than the humans, and do not even fight back in the end when the military destroys them. They are machine gunned in front of a church and die holding hands in what looks to be a 1960s love-in or non-violent protest, and although the song 'Give Peace a Chance' was not yet written in 1963, the same spirit was there. It also had strong Christian undertones along the lines of 'and the children shall lead them', and they are martyred by the forces of the



The kids of Midwich are cold and arrogant in their airs of superiority, and show no human feelings at all

national security state before they have the chance to do good.

Obviously, none of these movies can tell us anything about real ETs, nor were they intended to. The issues and concerns they raised were purely human ones, and the story lines about aliens were simply a vehicle for getting the message across. The postwar culture created aliens in its own image, reflecting its own concerns at any given historical instant, whether the fear of nuclear annihilation after 1945 or of zombie-like suburban conformity in the 1950s and the gap between generations due to the unprecedented affluence of the times. One commonality they all shared was that the aliens - our future selves - all felt superior to ordinary humans, much as the Nazis and Stalinists did. Because of their intelligence, technology or superior organization, they regarded themselves as the

wave of the future and everything that came before them as obsolete.

Even a benevolent alien like Klattu assumes the right to dictate to earthlings for their own good, and assumes his civilization where all power is in the hands of intelligent machines is really superior to any social organization in the present world. His benevolence is also of a very abstract, impersonal and intellectual kind, while the aliens in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Village of the Damned* do not have a concept of benevolence at all, only power.

The kids of Midwich are cold and arrogant in their airs of superiority, and show no human feelings at all, except at the very end, when they reveal a fear of death, while the pod creatures of Santa Mira believe their lack of emotion makes them better able to see the world clearly and realistically. They are all more or less

ruthless in achieving their goals and destroying all opposition, and even a relatively moral alien like the professorial Klattu feels free to threaten the world with a power cut off or total destruction unless it starts to toe the line and gets on the team.

None of the alien (future) societies is a democracy made up of free individuals. Klattu's world sounds like an elitist technocracy, while the kids of Midwich look like an aristocratic, Aryan elite and the pod creatures of Santa Mira like a totalitarian herd that occasionally gets orders barked through loudspeakers.

All these societies have found ways to eliminate the threat of war, of course, and none of the aliens ever fight each other or even question their leaders, but to one degree or another, they are all mass societies where people have no real liberty or independence. Most humans do not even show much enthusiasm for Klattu's authoritarian technocracy, but their only choice is to join or suffer prompt and utter destruction.

The verdict of these three films on human life and prospects for the future is a profoundly negative one, except for a few lonely heroes who struggle against the inevitable to preserve their humanity, and the in all cases, the cure on offer is far worse than the disease



It was 25 years ago, after a suggestion from Peter Rogerson, that we changed the name of this Magazine to *Magonia*. The 'Merseyside' part of our name had been dropped, and our attempts to maintain the acronym by substituting the word 'Metempirical' really didn't work - for one thing no-one, including ourselves, really had any idea what it meant! Also, as the scope of the magazine had expanded well beyond the realms of ufology, we felt that dropping the 'UFO' part of the title would be the next move. Obviously we couldn't just call it 'Bulletin', so a completely new title was needed.

The first issue under the new title featured an article by historian John Fletcher, which looked at the phenomena surrounding the millenarian

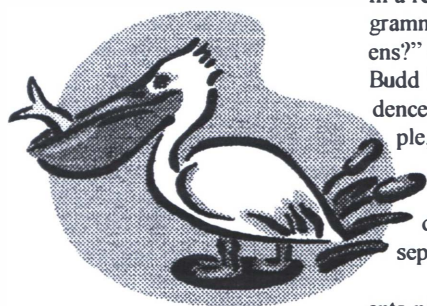
fervour in England at the time of the Civil War, Commonwealth and Restoration, particularly in the politically and religiously radical county of Somerset. Fletcher compared this to the visionary aspects of the 'airship' waves at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, which also took place during a period of widespread political and social change.

American researcher Berthold Schwarz took a look at the ethics of ufology, an ever-present concern, which is a growing concern today, with the continuing excesses of the abduction industry.

Peter Rogerson's INTCAT gamely ploughed on, taking us up to the end of 1959. The highlight of this section was the famous Reverend Gill

case, the missionary in New Guinea who along with local villagers, saw a UFO which hovered above them for two hours before disappearing. The next night it reappeared, and Gill and his companions waved to figures they saw moving around on the outside of the object, who allegedly waved back.

A number of explanations have been put forward for this case, including Gill's astigmatism, and a misinterpreted sighting of brightly lit squid-boats. (See Martin Kottmeyer's 'Gill Again', in *Magonia* 54, November 1995). Discussion of this case has been bedevilled by accusations of racism against anybody questioning the evidence of the villagers.



THE PELICAN WRITES...

El pelícano es fuerte en sus apreciaciones pero muy razonable

In a response to a television programme titled "Kidnapped by Aliens?" shown about nine years ago, Budd Hopkins wrote: "What evidence does Dr Sagan, for example, present to buttress his sweeping - and to the abductees, damning - indictment of their ability to separate fantasy from reality?"

Hopkins says he presents no evidence whatsoever, and here The Pelican has to agree with him. But of course, Sagan was a famous scientific pundit, who was wheeled on to pronounce on controversial matters concerning not only astronomy, but various other topics, regardless of whether or not they were within his sphere of competence. And, of course, there were people gullible enough to believe that if he knew about astronomy then he probably knew a great deal about many other subjects.

This sort of thing is typical of scientists who pride themselves on being sceptical, the eminent - or at least well known - scientist as a fount of all wisdom and knowledge.

The most notorious such person in Britain is Professor Richard Dawkins, zoologist and expert on evolution. His work on lucidly describing some of the more difficult details of evolution theory is widely praised, but he is equally well known to many for his anti-religious rants. These contain such absurdities as treating religious doctrines as if they purported to be scientific propositions, rather than considering how they are interpreted and what meanings are assigned to them in a religious context. Of course, Dawkins takes religious writings as being intended to be taken literally, word for word, just like scientific theories. One gets the impression that his concept of God is the childish one of a bad-tempered old man sitting on a cloud somewhere.

He prefers secular humanism as a philosophy of life and sometimes seems exasperated when that is also subjected to sceptical attack. (What's the point of it? Why not hedonism, it's more fun? etc.) Dawkins is the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford, but his anti-religious fulminations tend to alienate many of those who might benefit from a better understanding of scientific

methods and achievements.

Of course, Dawkins is smart enough not to make what Stanton Friedman would call "proclamations" about UFOs or whether or not intelligent life exists on other planets, but Sagan was only too willing to waffle on about there being aliens, but only at a safe distance from us, what they would or would not look like, etc, and all without a shred of evidence to support his speculations.

Thus UFO believers never saw him as being much of a threat. Those who not only don't believe we are under surveillance by ETs in flying saucers, but actually know a great deal about the subject are seen as the real enemies. First it was Donald Menzel, as chief bogeyman, later replaced by Philip Klass (kindly old Uncle Phil).

Klass tended to concentrate too much on speculating about the possible motives of UFO witnesses and investigators, rather than being content to establish the facts and let them speak for themselves. Other weaknesses, such as his tendency to uncritically accept the findings of polygraph operators, so long as they told him what he wanted to hear, and a tendency to over-simplify the situation in order to arrive at a neat conclusion, made him less effective than he might have been.

Menzel tried to explain many reports in terms of atmospheric optical effects, but the distortions of the testimony and the discarding of inconvenient details needed to do this made some of them seem too contrived to be convincing.

Other, less notorious, sceptics repeated the same error of fixing on a particular class of explanation and trying to make the vast bulk of UFO reports fit it. Stuart Campbell adopted the theory of ball lightning to explain puzzling close-encounter reports, but this generally pleased neither sceptics nor believers. As ball lightning is a controversial topic in itself, and as it could possibly explain only a very small number of UFO reports, a more adaptable theory was called for. Campbell eventually wrote a book which provided the definitive explanation for all UFO reports worth considering - mirages!

Most investigators of UFO reports - amateur or profes-

sional - have found that mirages can explain only a tiny percentage of them. This didn't bother Campbell, whose idea of mirages seems to be derived from the diagrams in school physics textbooks, in which the angles of refraction are greatly exaggerated for the sake of clarity. Campbell was not happy with the equations used to describe mirages, because they didn't provide much scope for spectacular optical mirages in the Earth's atmosphere, the angles of refraction in the real atmosphere, as opposed to those shown in explanatory diagrams, being much too small.

With his new, highly elastic version of optical mirage theory, Campbell was able to use it to explain such classics as Socorro and the film shot in Utah in 1952 by Delbert C. Newhouse, in a book which was greeted by guffaws by some and an embarrassed silence by others, depending on their views on ufology.

Albert Budden capped this, though with his electromagnetic theories of UFOs, which started quite reasonably, as these obsessive ideas usually do, with the hypothesis that artificially or naturally produced electromagnetic forces could perhaps account for some UFO experiences. Of course, in the process of developing this hypothesis it was downhill all the way as theories and explanations became ever more implausible, especially as Budden followed the usual practice with novel approaches to physics of avoiding all those precise measurements and difficult equations, which people who study real physics have to grapple with.

It is worth noting here that the absence of quantification is always a good indication of a cranky, pseudo-scientific theory. Even crazier theories are indicated by figures and equations which, on expert scrutiny, are shown to be meaningless or irrelevant.

The Pelican's ruminations, in preparation for filling a page of this august journal with his words of wisdom, have served to reinforce his conviction that while many eminent scientists are cranks, hardly any ufologists are eminent in any field and all but a few of them, sceptics or believers, are decidedly flaky. Believe them or not, respect them or not, but don't give them your credit card number and you should be OK.



READERS' LETTERS

Hi John,

Thank you for the magazine and the article by Frankson. We have written a most comprehensive reply which will appear in *Combat Diary* 21 in about two weeks time. All I will say at the moment is that we do hope that Frankson and Paul Sieveking in particular are not of a nervous disposition. One thing we are afraid of is that give the extraordinary photograph of Frankson you are trying to counter-cyber us, and John Harney created this Harry Lauder clone on Photoshop as a gull. But be that as it may.

Here is a sample of what is to come. Patricia says: "The *Combat Diaries*, running at well over a thousand hits per day, has a very young audience, and therefore we would not expect *Magonia Magazine* nor the *Fortean Times*, being rather middle-aged, to understand its avant-garde energies and anarchic inspirations. Though the scepticism of *Magonia Magazine* has had the most profound effect on the *Fortean Times*, we must admit however that at least on the strength of the get-Bennett article, *Magonia Magazine* still has a kind of bloody-minded energy and human interest that constitutes character, a most rare thing in the synthetic modern world.

"They are still as hairy-arsed as their typesetting and layout, and a reader can still smell the feet of the Brentford Polonius in a strong downwind from Brentford Leisure Centre, where there is still straw on the floor. But when our noses are turned towards the *Fortean Times*, there is no such street-level pong these days, just a faint whiff of plastic and an odour of corporate robots working on synthetic wonders and conspiratorial agendas."

I would like to offer the response to your magazine claiming right of reply, but it is too long and is lavishly illustrated. Perhaps

you would kindly inform readers of your next issue merely that the *Combat Diaries* reply to Mr Frankson's article can be seen on <http://www.combat-diaries.co.uk>.

By the way, I have a new book coming out early next year. This is *An American Demonology*, a New Ufology (fortean/postmodern) look at the USAF and UFO investigations. This book is made for *Magonia* magazine 96 it has an Introduction by Nick Pope, a Foreword by Jerry Clark, and is (no less) dedicated to George Hansen, author of *The Trickster and the Paranormal*, yet a third *Magonia bete-noire*. You can trash the four of us in one, thus save on paper. You might like to inform also your readers of this coming event in order to adequately prepare themselves for the shock. One thing is certain - my book will be better than a BUFORA meeting as described by your good self.

Your Editorial is a masterpiece, and we would like to publish this in the *Combat Diaries*, as it just about sums up the cause of death of at least UK ufology. The sight of the name John Rimmer in the contents list of the *Combat Diaries* would raise heart-beating palpitations in many a non-anarcho-syndicalist dove-cote, including that of the quite extraordinary Mr. Frankson, of whom more later.

Best wishes to you, sir!
Colin Bennett, Notting Hill

Dear John

I should like to retract the retraction that I made in *Magonia* 84, where I said that an air-turbine (contrary to what I had written before) could not in practice generate enough thrust to make it fly. But this is a very complex matter, and I learn from *Fortean Times* 188 that the Avrocar was powered by an air turbine, and it *did* fly,

though not very well. It was also circular, so something similar could well have been built in Germany a decade or so earlier.

One seldom sees squirrels in Russell Square, probably because they spend most of their time out of sight among the branches of trees. But how, then given that one grey squirrel looks very much like another, could anyone manage to count them? And is it possible, as you ask, to grab a squirrel and put it in a bag? In the same way, in the cat-skinning scares of the 1990s, it is said that a woman "was seen stroking a cat and then snatching it and putting it in a bag". In fact people who catch stray cats do so by means of cages to which the animals are lured by a bait of kitty nosh. If they simply tried to grab them, the cats would usually escape.

Squirrel meat, according to the *Camden New Journal*, "is turning up on the tables of London's trendiest restaurants" - have any of your readers seen a menu offering *fricassée d'écureuil*? - "and poorer households". This reminds me of the occasion a few years ago when it was claimed that someone was kidnapping pigeons from Trafalgar Square to serve up to West End diners. Eventually it was pointed out that pigeons are virtually inedible unless they have been specially bred for the table.

On the other hand, the late Milton Schuman once wrote a children's book, *Preep: The Little Pigeon of Trafalgar Square*, where the eponymous hero is abducted by a sinister figure who proves to be a man unable to afford to buy meat for his family. The point is, that squirrels might conceivably be eaten by the very rich or the very poor, but hardly both.

Best Wishes
Garth Medway,
London SW7

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Dot Weighbridge

William Roll and Valerie Storey. *Unleashed: Of poltergeists and murder, the curious story of Tina Resch.* Paraview Pocket Books, 2004. \$14.00.

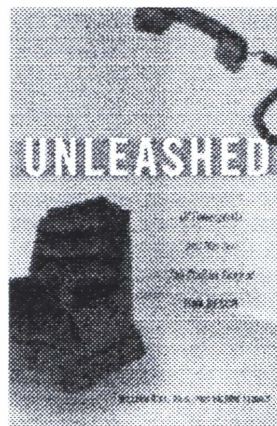
Tina Resch was the centre of a dramatic poltergeist case in Columbus, Ohio twenty years ago. She was a 14-year-old adopted girl, around whom strange things were said to happen, and as is usual in such cases, believers believed and sceptics were sceptical. Eventually it was claimed she had been caught cheating, and she rather disappeared from public view, only to re-emerge eight years later accused of killing her child.

Roll was the parapsychologist who investigated the case, and he seems to have become a sort of surrogate grandfather to Tina. The story which is presented here certainly reinforces my view that alleged paranormal episodes have to be read in the context of a whole biographical narrative. The portrait painted (and it must be stressed that I have no way at present of evaluating the truth or otherwise of any statement made in this book, which may very well be a partial and biased account), is of a girl adopted into an outwardly respectable family, who are hailed by their neighbours as kind foster parents, whose charges include a severely neu-

rologically challenged baby, and who have several adopted children.

Roll however paints the portrait of a Tina as a classical Cinderella child, who is made the scapegoat for all the family's problems. According to Roll she was sexually abused by one of the boys in the household, emotionally abused by her adopted mother, and beaten by her adoptive father (and I am sure that most British social workers would see the beating of a sexually maturing young woman by a man as a form of sexual abuse). The portrait is of the sort of people one encounters time and again in adoption survivor narratives, who adopt cute little babies but try to return to sender when they grow to be obstreperous teenagers. Again I must emphasize that I have no way of knowing whether this is a factually accurate portrayal, or simply Tina's gloss on events.

Nevertheless, whether or not the poltergeist effects are produced by paranormal means or not, they can clearly be read as a cry for help, and they contain some obvious symbolism. Tina is treated as a 'wild outsider' an un-



tamed force in the home, like a sort of changeling. So around her breaks out untamed wildness, shattering the structure of the tightly controlled household. This, of course, only alienates Tina even more from her carers/keepers. Teenagers often ventilate their

chaotic emotions by acts of vandalism, but these are usually directed outwards, often at liminal places such as semi-derelict buildings or unowned public spaces. Here, however, it is clearly directed inwards, and if we view the home as an extension of the self, as a kind of self harm by proxy.

We could also see this in her subsequent involvement with a number of abusive men, the last of whom, according to Roll at any rate, is the real killer of her child, though she contributed to its neglect. Tina on this reading is a typical victim of the class and gender bias of the American legal system and an unconcerned public defender, though the sceptic might ask Roll why, if he so convinced of Tina's innocence, he didn't hire a better lawyer himself.

BOOK REVIEWS

All reviews by Peter Rogerson except where stated

Michael Busby. *Solving the 1897 Airship Mystery.* Pelican (sic) Publishing, 2004.

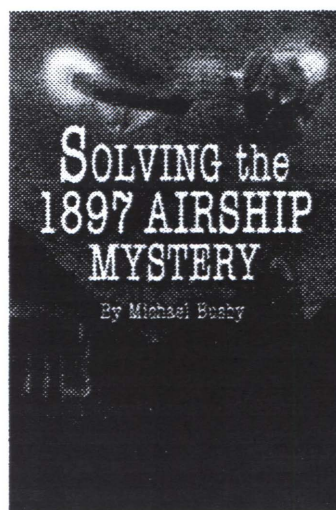
First the good news, Michael Busby here provides detailed transcripts of newspaper reports and-or folk tales of the airship taken from the Texas newspapers of 1897. These provide a rich vein of source material for ufologists and folklorists alike.

The less good news is that Busby, an engineer of course, takes all these stories at face value. These include such well known hoaxes as the Aurora crash, relocated traditional tales such as the aerial sailor of Merkel, and stories obviously written with tongue very much in cheek, as though there were all po-faced accounts of actual physical events. These events are then used as the building bricks of a vast narrative construction involving the real human operators of real humanly built airships.

As with modern theories of terrestrial secret projects, this

raises the obvious question of why nothing much was done with this amazing technology, other than faff around entertaining or scaring the pants off the locals. Busby produces a scenario in which the majority of the airships crash, killing the pilots, and the rest being si-

lenced by the railroad interests to account for this. However, as among the survivors were a couple of characters closed to the military-industrial complex of the period, this seems rather unlikely. One of these guys was later involved with military planning during the United States' involvement in the Great War, one wonders why the mystery airships weren't



brought in on the Allied side then. And what happened to them between 1897 and their reappearance in 1909?

Most ufologists have come to the view that the 1897 airship stories were largely hoaxes concocted by the press and by telegraph operators. Busby will have none of this,

but many of his arguments suggest he has a rather anachronistic view of the 19th century press as sober journals of record. Of course in the pre-cinema days they were often the main source of entertainment. Busby also cannot see that these stories were not 'hoaxes' played on an unsuspecting public, but satire, commentary and jokes which the readership would

have understood from the start.

However Busby does demonstrate that several of the 'inventors' named by the 'witnesses' were indeed real people, who he has been able to track through a variety of genealogical records. This suggests that if these stories were all fictions, there was rather more planning behind their appearance than has been assumed. Whether some of these stories were planted as part of a commercial scam, were part of a propaganda campaign aimed at the Spanish, or as part of some political agenda is unclear. I suspect that to find the answer to that we would have to know a lot more than we do about the editors and proprietors of the newspapers involved, and their social, business and political circles.

It's also more than possible that rather more of these stories than has been assumed are based on the sort of visionary, dreamlike experiences that we encounter in today's studies of anomalous personal experience. The airship was a prime symbol of ambivalent modernity, and the stories came at a time of mounting war hysteria and domestic social unrest. The November 1896 US presidential election had been the first ideological contest between the major candidates since the Civil War. The gold standard and imperialist candidate William McKinley having beaten the silver standard and anti-imperialist William Jennings Bryan, who had electrified the country with his famous 'Cross of Gold' speech. One of the great themes of the airship stories was its use as a weapon of mass destruction to be used against Cuba - the modern American technological world versus the old world of Catholic Spain. In these dreams, visions, satires, short stories, hoaxes and urban legends one encounters a mixture of edging humour and an undercurrent of real menace. Reading them you understand that through them people are encountering the promise and menace of the coming century, unable to tell if it will make its people angels or devils.

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• Alex Owen. *The place of Enchantment: British occultism and the culture of the modern.* University of Chicago Press, 2004. \$30.00

• Corinna Treitel. *A Science for the Soul: occultism and the genesis of the German Modern.* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004 £33.50.

These two books are part of a trend to see the rise of occultism and spiritualism not as a regression to some 'primitive' past, but as part of the response to the rise of the modern post Christian world.

Alex Owen takes as her examples the occult movement in Britain from the rise of the Theosophical Society to the dominance of Alastair Crowley. This narrow emphasis on occultist groups, rather than say, mesmerism and Spiritualism somewhat weakens her case. Though Theosophy shared to some degree spiritualism's usurpation of scientific language and at least partially, its vision of human brotherhood (though with rather too much emphasis on the 'Aryan' for modern ears), the Golden Dawn and its successors were much more avowedly reactionary. Alex Owen rather underplays this side of English occultism, for example she doesn't comment on how the GD's founder, Samuel "MacGregor" Mathers was involved in neo Jacobite politics.

It is perhaps in these movements' attractions to the emancipated 'New Woman' that they most appear modern, and Owen provides several biographies which illustrate this point, most notably of Annie Besant, and, of course, of HPB herself. However, being a New Woman didn't always translate into a concern for



the social emancipation of other people, especially the working class, and even the once progressive Besant, by far and away the most sympathetic of the characters in this book, turned to theosophy as turning away from her earlier atheism and socialism. In her later years she was to turn a blind eye to the activities of the paedophile Charles Leadbetter. At least Crowley usually took his partners from more or less consulting adults.

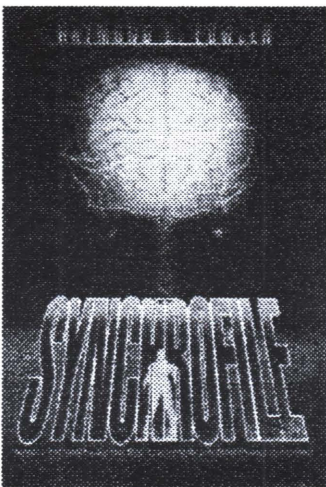
The occult in Germany has had a bad press, with sensationalist books claiming the Nazis had occult roots, or that Hitler was a black magician. Much of this started with *Dawn of Magic* co-written by the French radical rightist Louis Pauwels, and the semi mysterious Jacques Bergier. Much of this, as Treitel points out to distance the Nazis from the mainstream of Western thought. In reality their exterminatory fantasies were far from unique to Germany. If Germany had won the First World War, a defeated Britain, having lost her colonies and forced to pay crippling reparations, might have produced her own

monstrous tyrant - one Herbert George Wells perhaps?

In tracing the rise of occultism and spiritualism in Germany from the Empire to the Nazis, Treitel points out that as many of these groups espoused "progressive" causes of human solidarity, as any kind of racist 'Aryan' philosophy, and "occult" groups were persecuted by the Nazis as a consequence of this. Her study perhaps makes the links with modernity clearly than Owen's. The German spiritualists recruited from those dissatisfied with the traditional Lutheran church, which was seen as supporting the reactionary official state, against the rising liberal commercial and intellectual bourgeoisie. It also attracted those, such as Karl F Zollner, the antisemitic and anti-liberal physicist who became notorious for his experiments with the fake medium 'Doctor' Henry Slade. Imperial Germany developed both a wide range of disparate occult, spiritualist and "psychical research" societies, and a vigorous 'skeptical' counter-movement. The row between these two groups culminated in the trial of the (fake) medium Anna Rothe.

In the Weimar period interest in the occult continued, as did the quasi scientific psychical research of men like Von Notzing. One of the main "occult" interests of this period was dowsing and some of the writers in this field clearly anticipated later ideas about earth energies, telluric fields and the like and to have developed a sort of home grown *feng shui*.

Reading these books makes one wonder what historians of 50 to 100 years time will make of the visions and beliefs of our own period, and what they will tell them about our own societies.



Raymond Fowler. *SynchroFile: amazing personal encounters with synchronicity and other strange phenomena.* Universe, 2004. \$20.95.

This book is full of accounts of what Fowler considers extraordinary coincidences in his life, and the lives of his family and friends, as well as many other odd personal experiences. At times it seems so thick and fast that one wonders where he found the time to follow his obviously very busy work and leisure activities. To some extent these 'coincidences' may be the product of a heightened sense of vigilance and sensitivity to borderline perceptual clues, others may be evidence that we process incoming information unconsciously before it comes to conscious attention.

It's not clear how much of Fowler's multiple sleep disorders are caused by his admitted sleep apnoea (a disorder in where people stop breathing when asleep, usually causing them to wake up briefly on an almost continual basis), but it seems plausible to suggest a visit to a sleep laboratory would be useful for him, and help provide some clues as to the nature of claimed nocturnal abductions, and other varieties of the secret 'night adventure'.

David Clarke. *The Angel of Mons. Phantom Soldiers and Ghostly Guardians*. John Wiley & Sons, 2004

Mons was an important battle for several reasons. One of the earliest engagements in the Great War, it was also virtually the last battle of movement in that conflict, now seen as an archetypally static and destructive contest. Mons also proved the virtue of the British Army's insistence on musketry training: so disciplined, rapid and accurate was the BEF's rifle marksmanship (these were all professional soldiers) that the advancing Germans were convinced they were facing massive machine-gun fire. Technically, the British lost the fight. In practical and propaganda terms, Mons was a victory, because it halted the German advance. Finally, the battle featured, certainly in hindsight and just possibly at the time, curious sights and visions that were taken to be angels acting in support of the retreating BEF.

It is scarcely news that fighting for one's life may have bizarre psychological side-effects. One well-known result of adrenaline and endorphin 'dumps' into the bloodstream is the subjective slowing-down of time. In one of his Lethal Force Institute lectures, Mas Ayoob cites several cases of policemen having out-of-the-body experiences in the midst of a fire-fight. Their consciousness seemed to gain altitude, so that they found themselves looking down at themselves, in the midst of mayhem, from above. There is a whole literature on the effects of combat on memory, which in some individuals under stress may intensify radically, and in others simply not function at all.

As this issue's cover picture shows, things are not always what they seem at first glance. As in debates on firearms, so it is in the history of warfare (whether on a battlefield, or in the street). Folklore may reflect and report actual facts, or it may distort them. Dubbed by some academics 'unofficial history', the base material of folk stories is neither necessarily true nor necessarily untrue. The narratives tend to dramatize emotions rather than be forensically picky as to facts. One of the many strengths of Dr Clarke's book is the way he traces how what may have been partly a battlefield rumour and partly a se-

ries of false if honestly-recalled memories, was turned to advantage by the Allies' psychological warfare experts, to raise and maintain morale during the darkest days of the war.

The standard paranormalist version of events is that advancing German troops were stopped dead in their tracks at Mons by ghostly reinforcements of the British and French armies. In the former case, these spooky interventionists were variously knights on horseback (identified as St George), bowmen (spirits from Agincourt), or angels. The French were aided by St Jeanne d'Arc and her ethereal echelons.

The standard rationalist view is that these tales were back-formations from a hugely popular story by journalist Arthur Machen, titled 'The Bowmen', and published well after the battle at Mons. Machen himself believed that this was what had happened. Some soldiers may have incorporated Machen's fiction into their own memories of the battle and its aftermath, while in other cases the published story helped to generate a folk legend that was always told second- or third-hand, and in which the participants were always a friend of a friend. Even more significantly, the legend of the angels did not begin to circulate until the following year, when the war was not going well for the British; and then angel lore soon became a veritable industry.

One initial difficulty with the debunkers' version is the appearance of Joan of Arc among the French - who had not read Machen's story; and no equivalent literary effort in French has turned up. Similarly, there was a Russian version of the Mons legend, in which the Virgin Mary appeared at the battle of Augustovo in September 1914. Dr Clarke notes, however, the long history of 'divine', saintly, and ghostly interventions to assist the imperilled on battlefields. In view of that venerable tradition, Machen's story may be said to have been a catalyst. Among the British, at least, it both tapped into an existing stream of the folk imagination and gave it new, concrete life. A key ingredient in its success was the lack of direct reportage from the front line - the British public had little idea, but a desperate wish to know, of how the war in France was going.

As noted, the tale of the

angels of Mons answered an emotional need, as well as a thirst for facts, and was subtly encouraged by the authorities for that reason. Certainly no senior soldier or civil servant strove officiously to deny it. Yet not everyone accepted it unthinkingly. As with all 'unofficial history', it generated a massive dispute, and there was a vigorous and outspoken opposition, led by Machen, to taking the story at face value. The debunkers seem to have had little impact at the time.

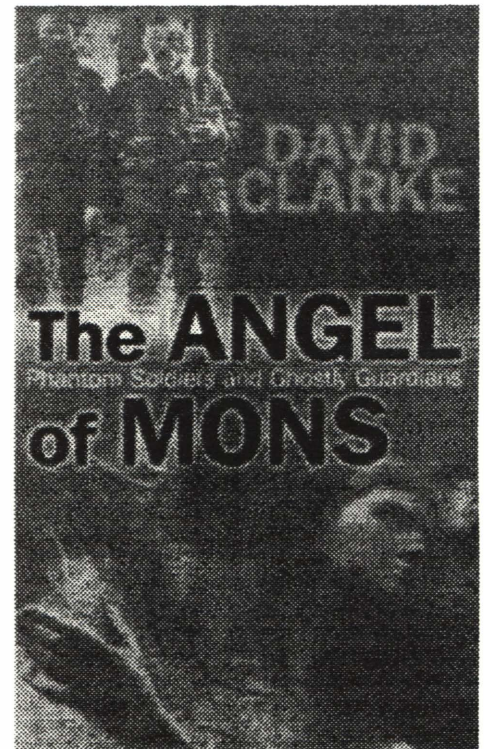
Did anyone see anything remotely angelic, really? Dr Clarke's research has been prodigious, and shows how the accounts of bowmen, gallant knights, and other visionary wraiths slowly rendered themselves down to tales of angels alone. The best candidates for paranormal entities of any kind appear to be a few radically misinterpreted odd lights in the sky, either from stars or atmospheric effects such as the Aurora borealis. No first-hand witnesses have ever been found: no veteran of the battles of 1914 has ever claimed to have seen the 'angels' with his own eyes. Soldiers did report strange experiences, but these are recognizably the result of extreme exhaustion. The great value of this book is that it shows how a combination of actual events (the battle, and a piece of popular fiction), propaganda, and existing folklore can combine to create a fresh 'truth'. Compare the way the press, police, and government handle (or create) stories about the use and misuse of firearms, and their appliance of folklore and propaganda.

Highly recommended for these reasons, and to anyone with an interest in the weirder byways of military history.

Peter Brookesmith

(This review first published in *The Shooter's Journal* [No 48, Summer 2004: available from SRA, PO Box 3, Cardigan SA43 1BN] of which the reviewer is the editor. He is also a graduate of the Lethal Force Institute.)

Dubbed by some academics 'unofficial history', the base material of folk stories is neither necessarily true nor necessarily untrue. The narratives tend to dramatize emotions rather than be forensically picky as to facts





Quaker Notes

This year's *Fortean Times* Un-Convention was transported from its usual time and place - Kensington's spacious Commonwealth Institute in April, to the unfamiliar and cramped surroundings of the Friends' Meeting House, Euston Road, at the end of October - with variable results. I heard one person complaining that the Halloween timing was interfering with them performing their rituals - I assume they were not referring to the silent worship practised by the Quakers.

Rather more in keeping with Quaker practice was the audio-visual equipment in use in the main meeting hall, which produced some visual but precious little audio. However no Fortean or ufological conference would be complete without a complete technical cock-up at some point, so one shouldn't really complain.

The venue was more tightly packed than the Commonwealth Institute, with stalls and displays tucked away in corridors and smaller rooms, but this perhaps reflected the anarchic nature of this event. However the main meeting hall comfortably coped with the thousand or more attendees, which was vital as, with only one stream of talks, the audience was not split between two venues. This meant that we had a chance to hear all the speakers, but at the cost of a great deal of stamina, and a



Turkmenbashi



Filer

Have any of your readers noticed the remarkable resemblance between George Filer, Director of MUFON's Eastern Region, and Turkmenbashi Nazayov? One is a ruthless despot with arbitrary power over thousands of people, and the other is President of Turkmenistan. I wonder if by any chance they could be related?

reduction in the range of topics covered.

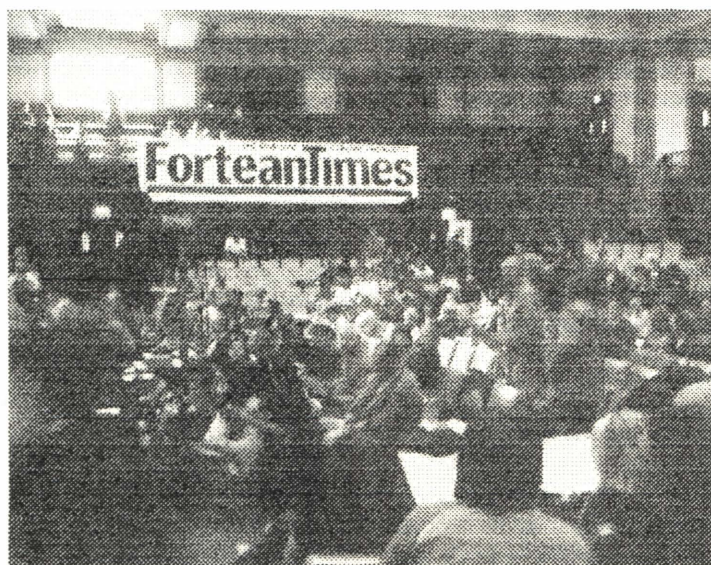
Magonians were particularly interested in Andy Roberts's talk on Cynthia Appleton and her 'space baby', one of the landmark British cases of the 1950s. Andy's important point was that the contactee cases of the earlier years of ufology are an important part of the story, and that attempts by 'scientifically' oriented ufologists to airbrush them out of sight in the interests of a coherent ETH narrative are dangerously wrong-headed. This tendency continues today, of course, with the ongoing 'tidying up' of the abduction narrative Andy also offered an interesting sidelight into the 'UFO vicars' of the Ap-

pleton era, one of whom even ran skywatches from his church tower!

Other highlights include Marina Warner's discussion of ectoplasm and the role of women in early Spiritualism, with descriptions of earnest investigations by SPR luminaries which produced a bizarre mixture of sexuality and high comedy. Gary Lachman's description of the life and work of Mussolini's 'guru' Julius Evola illuminated a little-known corner of political history.

Of course, the *Magonia* contingent were keeping a careful lookout for sudden attacks by Panzerben, the militant wing of Colin Bennett's Postmodernist Liberation Army, attempting to free *Fortean Times* from the baleful sceptical control of Rimmer and Roberts. According to Bennett, *Fortean Times* is now aimed at a Bertie Woosterish sort of chap who lives in a world of Victorian nostalgia. I looked carefully for one of these characters, and I think I saw him manning one of the bookstalls. But as with other FT UnCons, the audience was largely young, the vast majority under thirty. Sceptical yes, but as sceptical of conventional wisdom as of unconventional speculation, and as post-modern as you could wish for. So if the wicked Magonian mobsters have been trying to convert *Fortean Times* into a pale imitation of *Skeptical Inquirer* we have so far failed miserably.

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Crazed Magonia sceptics storm the main meeting hall of the Fortean Time UnConvention